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ABSTRACT

Although all the implications of equal educational opportunity cannot be determined at the present time, schools of educational administration must stress the offensiveness of social injustice and commit themselves to the development of a culturally pluralistic society through the use of available institutional means. The 35 departments of educational administration that responded to the survey indicated that there is typically no special admission policy for minority persons, only six departments have any validation of their admission criteria, only eight have obtained professional opinions as to the legality of their criteria, 14 departments have explicit standards for measurable criteria and 19 departments do not, and exceptions are made for candidates who do not meet specific criteria. As positive steps, departments might determine the particular market they are preparing administrators for as a means of helping adopt admission criteria, conduct some type of formalized study to determine what relationship exists between admission criteria and successful completion of the program, and consider if departments want to use a specially constructed standardized test with a national norm. (Author/IRT)

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An Examination of Admission Criteria For Graduate Students in Departments of Educational Administration

by
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In reviewing the criteria used to select graduate students and the numerous studies done regarding those criteria, we might note that neither all criteria nor all studies have been reviewed—a virtual impossibility given the time constraints of our project. We should also note that there are no perfect predictors of success either in graduate programs or on-the-job accomplishments. In arguing for the usefulness of certain standardized tests, McIntyre has written:

> So, tests are far from perfect predictors. They do surprisingly well, though, in giving us predictions that are useful actuarially, even though they must be used with great caution when we deal with individuals, hence, we must use appropriate test scores together with as much other relevant information as we can get.[1]

Furthermore, most of the material dealing with this broad subject is concerned primarily with undergraduate admissions and the appropriate criteria for determining these selections.

Although admission to any program of higher education has always been of concern to administrators, admission officers and faculty, recent developments in the past five years have heightened this concern and while undergraduate programs have had to review carefully their admission standards and criteria, graduate programs, as a rule, have not felt until recently much pressure to scrutinize their admission criteria. This pressure probably culminated in the now famous DeFunis case alleging reverse discrimination. Since the filing of the suit in 1971, many graduate programs have been aware of the fact that their admission criteria may be suspect, either favoring discrimination or favoring reverse discrimination.

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Although law suits have been numerous in recent years, the parameters regarding admission to graduate programs are still poorly defined. Part of this problem is due to the fact that most people, including the courts, still consider graduate education a privilege rather than a right. As a result, greater latitude is allowed in the selection criteria used and also in the actual implementation of the criteria.

Another point often advanced is that graduate programs should be and are elitist in nature, for the very concept of selecting outstanding students for graduate work opposes the egalitarian idea of educating all. However, outstanding students come from many diverse backgrounds, and often the difficult problem occurs in defining what is meant by "outstanding".

In all probability, the material presented in this report will raise more questions than are answered, as there are no definitive solutions to the problems associated with graduate admissions. A vigorous dialogue will, at least, raise the numerous issues which must be considered, and from such a discussion, sound policies may emerge.

Historical and Philosophical Context of Graduate Admissions

In recent years, especially since the Coleman Report of the mid-60's, there has been an increasing awareness of inequalities at all levels of the educational system. Reverse discrimination has become a major philosophical, legal, and educational issue plaguing many graduate schools across the nation. For the university the issue of equality of educational opportunity has its beginnings in the historical enlargement of the functions of the American university.

The university in the United States originally functioned to train the elite and independently wealthy to assume tasks of leadership, reinforcing their positions of power, "liberalizing" their point of view by acquainting them with languages, arts, and various social sciences. It did not, however, operate to prepare persons to assume roles previously unavailable to them. It did not function to reform or modify society, to provide status mobility; rather, it served to strengthen already existing structures.

In the 1890's the schools, including the universities, were cast as fundamental levers of social and political regeneration, and soon after the turn of the century universities began to interrelate academic studies, practical studies, and politics. Unlike the public elementary and secondary schools which were clearly directed toward incorporating the masses into "the American system," the universities were caught in the tension between their traditional role of preparing the elite and the newly emerging role of "preparation" for future jobs. The depression of the 1930's strengthened the relation of vocationalism and the university which has continued to this day. It is in this historical tension between pure academia and vocationalism that the present questions related to the admission of graduate students to programs of Educational Administration are to be found.

Thomas Green has stressed that a defining feature of an educational system is the distribution of goods and benefits.[2] Presently such goods and benefits can be understood to mean either income, occupational opportunity, and social class mobility or knowledge, skills, and certificates. Although Green posited these as two distinct categories, one can argue that certificates become the vehicle for social mobility, occupational opportunity, and the resultant increase in income. The educational system is in the business of certification based upon merit as determined by standardized and informal testing. It is not, however, in the business of directly distributing jobs. Such an understanding is especially relevant for the field of Educational Administration which is called upon to certify individuals for specific occupational positions.

The social structure of American society-fraught with social, economic, and political inequities--provides the present-day reality within which the university must confront the tension in the various interpretations of its role. The shift of the educational system towards vocationalism and certification of individuals is related to an increased awareness of the importance of social justice and the urgency of equality, understood economically. Equal educational opportunity becomes the focal point for relating justice and certification in order to provide for economic and social mobility in a society which is often called pluralistic but which clearly fails to meet Pratte's definition of a culturally pluralistic society as one in which "approximately equal political, economic, and educational opportunity exists so that no definable group can be identified as disadvantaged relative to social, economic, and political power."[3]

Equal educational opportunity has become the slogan by which the society has responded to the obvious lack of real cultural pluralism. The concept of equal educational opportunity does not imply that "everyone must achieve equal political, economic, and educational achievement in order for the condition to be met" but that "the range should be about the same for each group . . . no group would be discriminated against as a group."[4] This carries with it the implicit assumption that the capacity to learn is equally distributed within all groups. The differential distribution of learning abilities must be assumed not as a lack of capacity or lack of choice, but rather as a lack of power to develop capacities. This lack of power has its base in the historical and contemporary societal restriction associated with social class, economic status, sex and/or race.

The concept of equality of educational opportunity implicit in most U.S. educational practices assumes that equality is satisfied when there is equal access to educational structures or equal exposure to curricula and resources.[5] Such a concept of a "just meritocracy" places the responsibility upon the individual to make use of the equal opportunities provided and depends upon some objective measure of the acquisition of skills which allows the system to advance the learner. However, a "just meritocracy" approach can only be posited as just if the society is already a functioning culturally pluralistic society as defined above. America is not.

Recently a new understanding of equality of educational opportunity has arisen focusing upon the *effects* of schooling rather than upon the exposure to equal school opportunities. The emphasis is upon output rather than input, upon equal achievement rather than equal resources, and upon equal distribution of learning capacity. Therefore, the responsibility lies with the institutions, with the school, not with the individual. Equal educational opportunity is achieved when there is equal distribution of educational achievement between all groups.

Since discrepancies between groups reflect the continued social and economic inequities of American society, it follows that an individual from a minority and/or disadvantaged group who scores in the high range of his group on some measure of achievement is likely to be a person of greater ability and/or potential than an individual from the mainstream of U.S. society who scores the same but is near the mean of his or her group.

Thus the only way one can hope to approximate the goal of equal educational opportunity in the achievement or benefit sense is to increase the rate of learning for the educationally disadvantaged. Such an increase under present societal realities, would require some type of compensatory education, i.e., providing more than equal resources to those who are disadvantaged.

A significant refinement of the equal educational opportunity concept in higher education concerns the boundaries within which such a concept ought to

operate. Gordon has said that the purpose of education is to provide for "meaningful participation in the mainstream of society" with "meaningful participation" meaning economic, social, and political survival.[6] If one accepts Jencks' definition of the "cost-of-living" as the cost of participating in the social system, higher education can be seen as increasingly more necessary to achieve an "average" cost-of-living. Clearly the complexity comes in trying to determine to what degree graduate education is so necessary, for participating in society can certainly be understood to mean more than economic survival. There are, at a minimum, intellectual components as well as the usually recognized social, political, and economic components.

Since this is not a question which can be satisfactorily resolved at the present time, we need to stress the offensiveness of social injustice and commit ourselves to the development of a culturally pluralistic society through the utilization of available institutional means.

Admission Policies, Practices and Criteria of Selected Departments of Educational Administration

During the summer of 1975 a questionnaire about graduate admissions was circulated to Educational Administration Departments in the United States and Canada. In total, 47 questionnaires were distributed and 39 were returned--an 83% return.

In summary, departments have an admission policy set equally by the graduate school and a department faculty committee. In 35 cases admission decisions can be appealed by the student. Typically there is no special admission policy for minority persons although five institutions did report having such a policy and eight have special funds for minority students. Such funds are allocated on the basis of financial need, personal promise and recommendation rather than upon grade point average and standardized test scores. Although two institutions reported having special funds for women, none of the departments has special programs or policies for women.

The purpose of the admission procedure encompasses both likely success in the program and in subsequent job placement, with efforts both to select the most capable and screen out the incapable. There are no quota systems for any minority groups. Some institutions reported that they wanted to increase the number of minorities and/or women being admitted but they did not indicate how or to what degree this was, in fact, being done.

Most of the questionnaire was directed toward the criteria used to admit students. In interpreting the table below, please note the following:

- Only six departments have any validation of their criteria.
- Only eight departments have obtained professional opinion as to the legality of their criteria.
- Relative to the measurable criteria, 14 departments have explicit standards for such criteria and 19 departments do not.
- Only three departments insist that the standards of *all* criteria be met with 80% of the responding institutions indicating that a student can be admitted if a given number of criteria is met.
- Exceptions to the admission criteria are never made in one department only. Exceptions in all the other institutions are usually made on one of three grounds:
  a. affirmative action for minorities
  b. personal qualifications
  c. the committee's professional judgment of the applicant's professional promise. This is the most common basis for any exceptions.
- If exceptions are made for candidates who do not meet specific criteria, the following apply in between 60% to 75% of the situations:
  a. Once admitted, the student must meet all program requirements.
  b. The student's program is designed to strengthen weak areas.
  c. The faculty gives extra time and personal attention to these students.
- See chart of criteria in Table 1.

Respondents were asked to reflect upon the problems which, to them, were the most crucial in the admission of graduate students. The issues which they identified are summarized as follows:

1. Identifying and validating truly discriminating criteria which are predictive and defensible. The difficulty with validation is seen especially with the widely used quantifiable measures.
2. Conflict over whether admission criteria can predict success as an administrator. Such success is a complex of many skills.
3. There is continuing tension concerning graduate school as a professional school or as a pure academic school. The issue is a matter of emphasis and balance.

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Table I
Survey Results

Admission Criteria Currently Used

Criteria	Ph.D.	Ed.D.	Ed.S.	Other (specify)	
Miller Analogy Test	22	19	7	10	M.A.
Grade Point Average	28	28	17	15	M.A.
Graduate Record Exam	20	23	12	8	
Cooperative English Test	4	4	2	1	M.A.
References: Personal	19	20	11	7	M.A.
Academic	28	25	14	11	M.A.
Professional	26	26	15	11	M.A.
Experience	20	25	16	7	M.A.
General Background	13	16	9	3	M.A.
Employability	8	10	7	1	
Measures of Interest	5	4	0	2	M.A.
Personal Interviews					& M.Ed.
Open-ended	16	16	8	5	M.A.
Set format	1	1	0	0	
Ethnic Origin	3	4	1	1	
Sex	2	3	0	0	
Age (if yes, what is age limit?)	1 (50 yrs.)	1 (50 yrs.)			
Other					
Graduate Grade Point	1	0	1	1	M.A.
Average	0	1	0	0	
Statement of Career Interest	1	1	0	0	
Age Limit of 35	0	1	1	1	
Samples of Writing					
Exceptional Performance-Past Experience	1	1	1		

4. Some respondents felt that departments do not get a sufficient number of highly qualified applicants so that they are forced to choose a lower quality of student than they would prefer.

5. Support of graduate students financially is a problem at several levels.

   a. Lack of financial support causes the loss of highly qualified students.
   b. Most aid is in the form of work study or assistantships and does not allow for full-time study.

6. Schools training administrators for urban posts reported concern that the skills necessary for successful completion of a graduate program are not the same as those which an urban administrator needs in a complex multi-ethnic environment.

7. Some departments feel that Educational Administration is a white, male enclave and wish to get more balance among men, women, and minorities.

Legal Considerations of Graduate Admissions

Until quite recently policies and procedures at universities were seldom questioned and then, almost, never in a formal fashion. Now, university officials find themselves faced with a barrage of law suits covering virtually every aspect of university life. The initial and landmark case in this area seems to be *Dixon vs. Albama State Board of Education* in 1961, the decision of which granted constitutional protection to students being dismissed from a state institution. Since 1961, there have been innumerable cases covering many facets of university affairs, culminating in the now famous DeFunis case which was originally filed in 1971. Many hoped that the Supreme Court might provide some guidelines for universities in this rather difficult area in reaching a decision in the DeFunis case. However, instead of addressing itself to the very difficult issues raised by the DeFunis case, the Supreme Court declared the case was moot; and that was the end of the case in terms of legal significance. However, the thorny issues raised by this case concerning criteria for admitting students to law school (and theoretically, other graduate schools) still remain. There are no significant court decisions in this area, and the guidelines are neither clear nor well established.

Recently, however, the California Supreme Court ruled that the state universities could consider factors

other than grades and test scores in admitting students--such as the needs of society--"but without regard to race." This decision bans minority quotas in the graduate schools of California's state university system. This decision now appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court will allow them another opportunity to rule on the reverse discrimination issue.

Gellhorn and Hornby have written:

> In the case of academic judgments, the situation (as opposed to student discipline) differs vastly. Not only is there no applicable Supreme Court decision, but there are also few lower court opinions - a substantial number of challenges have been dismissed without opinion. The few lower court opinions which have been written demonstrate significant reluctance to enter the area. Little more is required as a substantive "standard" than that the decision not be arbitrary or capricious. The burden of proof (practically insurmountable as every teacher knows) is on the student.[7]

Regarding the general area of admission criteria to higher education, Hornby has concluded in *Higher Education Admission Law Service*[8]:

> The only limitation commonly said to limit the criteria available as selection devices in admitting applicants to higher education is that they not be arbitrary or unreasonable.[9]

With respect to academic criteria, Hornby stated:

> It is in the area of academic judgments that higher education is accorded most deference by the courts. In 1968, the Fifth Circuit announced, "We know of no case which holds that colleges and universities are subject to the supervision or review of the courts in the uniform application of their academic standards."[10]

On the specific subject of admission, a New York appellate court has said:

> More particularly, a court should refrain from interjecting its views within those delicate areas of school administration which relate to the eligibility of applicants and the determination of marking standards, unless a clear abuse of statutory authority or a practice of discrimination or gross error has been shown.
>
> The determination as to what factors should enter into the standards set for admission was within the exclusive province of the college authorities. The judicial task ends when it is found that the applicant has received from the college authorities uniform treatment under reasonable regulations fairly administered.[11]

Hornby also continued:

> Unless the academic standards are arbitrary or capricious, so long as they were formulated by the proper authorities, judicial intereference with their substantive content occurs only when they have a discriminatory effect.[12]

Without going into a rather detailed review of the legal cases and judicial literature, it would probably be helpful to list six recommendations for state-supported law schools to follow with respect to their admission policies made by Gellhorn and Hornby in their article.[13] Because law schools are considered to be a type of graduate education, it does not seem unreasonable to believe that the six recommendations would not also provide helpful guidelines for other graduate areas such as Graduate Schools of Education and Departments of Educational Administration. The six recommendations suggested by Gellhorn and Hornby are:

1. At a minimum, state-supported law schools (or, a particular graduate school as the case may be) should articulate "ascertainable" standards or criteria for admissions. Once developed, they should be disseminated to the field of applicants and then applied in a uniform and impartial manner.

2. The standards or criteria developed for use in selecting matriculants must be validated i.e., reliably shown to measure qualities relevant to legitimate educational objectives of the state law school. (Ideally, but not necessarily, some of these criteria should be statistically or scientifically validated.)[14]

3. Whatever criteria are used, law schools should allow applicants the procedural opportunity to demonstrate that those particular criteria are inappropriate for assessing their qualities. (It may also be desirable to provide for a conference between the applicant and the Director of Admissions when there are factual disputes and, in addition, establish customary review procedures.)

4. Upon request, a rejected applicant should be given a specific statement of the reason(s) for his rejection.

5. Where a rejection relies on information not submitted by the applicant, he should be given access to this information and an opportunity to explain or contradict it.

6. Where a rejection is premised on disputed factual information rather than judgments or inferences, the applicant should be advised that an informal hearing procedure is available. (We advance this only as a recommendation, not as a minimum constitutional requirement, although it is arguably within the scope of what the Supreme Court might assert due process requires.)[15]

Final Considerations

Resolving the many difficult issues raised by graduate admission criteria is not an easy task. The study undertaken suggests several considerations for departments of educational administration.

First, departments may want to determine for what particular market they are preparing administrators--international, national, state, local or the professorship.

Also, will the future administrators be serving primarily rural areas, large urban areas, suburban areas, etc.? Such determinations may help to suggest certain admission criteria which would be more helpful than others.

Second, departments should conduct some type of formalized study to determine what relationship exists between admission criteria used and graduate students who have successfully completed the program during the past five years. It would also be helpful to carry the study an additional step and analyze the relationship of admission criteria and successfully practicing administrators, recognizing, of course, that success may be an intangible factor which is difficult to define. However, there are some administrators whose success is not questioned. This entire area of trying to establish predictors of success in educational administration needs further study.

Third, departments should formalize their admission criteria and policies by providing prospective students with a written description of what is required, e.g., a department bulletin. Such a document should also contain the procedure available for appealing admission decisions.

A final major consideration is whether departments of Educational Administration want to use a specially constructed standardized test with national norms such as the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) or the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT). Currently, an advanced test in education is given by the Educational Testing Service as part of the GRE. How adequate this examination is in selecting educational administrators needs further study. However, the advantages and disadvantages of a national testing program need additional study also.

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7. - Ernest Gellhorn and D. Brock Hornby. "Constitutional Limitations on Admissions Procedures and Standards--Beyond Affirmative Action," *Virginia Law Review*, Volume 60, Number 6 (October, 1974), p. 996.
8. - D. Brock Hornby. *Higher Education Admission Law Service*. Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service, 1973.
9. - See Op. N. M. Att'y. Gen. No. 67-77 (1967): the Board of Regents of a university have the authority to determine what qualifications are necessary for admission to the college or university and these standards have been consistently upheld so long as they are not arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to law.
   C.F. Keller v. Hewitt, 109 Cal, 146, 41P. 871 (1895) (where applicant for teaching certificate had met all board's criteria, board must issue certificate). The requirement that criteria not be arbitrary, that they have some rational basis, may be premised on state administrative or constitutional law or on what is sometimes called substantive due process.
10. - Wright v. Texas Southern University, 392 F.2d 728, 729 (5th Cir. 1968).
11. - Lesser v. Board of Education, 18 App. Div. 2d 388, 239 N.Y.S. 2d 776, 779-80 (1963) (refusal to weigh grades received in special program). It is said that (t)he reason for this rule is that in matters of scholarship, the school authorities are uniquely qualified by training and experience to judge the qualifications of a student, and efficiency of instruction depends in no small degree upon the school faculty's freedom from interference from other non-educational tribunals. It is only when the school authorities abuse the discretion that a court may interfere with their decision to dismiss a student.
    Donnelly v. University of Vt., 244 F. Supp. 156, 160 (D. Vt. 1965) (student dismissal on academic grounds.)
12. - D. Brock Hornby. *Higher Education Admission Law Service*. Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service, 1973, Section 106.
13. - Gellhorn and Hornby, *op. cit.*, pp. 975-1011.
14. - Where sound policy suggests a procedure which is not constitutionally required, the recommendations are listed in parentheses.
15. - Gellhorn and Hornby, *op. cit.*, pp. 1002-1010.